

Head Games



May 5, 2007

Like any enduring relationship, my love of motorcycling is subject to negative experiences which create doubts that may lead to abandoning what was once so captivating. And like any relationship worth having, learning how to work through these doubts is a valuable lesson. One I re-learned recently.

As spring crept past winter and the 2007 motorcycle season began in earnest, several tenants had conspired to take up rent-free residence in my head and were creating more FUD, (fear, uncertainty, and doubt), than I was comfortable hosting.

It actually started last fall with a couple of crashes at the track in Loudon. The first was during my first road race. After completing the Penguin Race School and the 3 lap Rookie Race, I had entered Race 9 in the Loudon Road Racing Series (LRRS) and was taken out by another rider in turn 1a on the 6th lap. No real harm done and I knew exactly what happened. (See [A Taste of Grass at Speed](#)¹ for the complete story!)

A few weeks later, I was working on my corner speed at a Loudon track day. I had a minor low side at the transition on turn three. I was fortunate that a couple of control riders saw it happen and the consensus is that I probably touched the brakes while at maximum lean and simply ran out of traction. Again, I have a good idea of what happened but collectively these two incidents had started filling out a rent controlled application and were making plans to move in.



In April of this year, my friend Jim and I headed to West Virginia for two days on the Jefferson Course at Summit Point. I was running a pretty good pace on Saturday, gradually getting faster, and concentrating on improving my drive out of the corners. As I made the last turn on to the front straight during the second session after lunch, my rear tire stepped out, followed by what felt like a tank slapper, a short flight and a crash landing. I managed to pick myself up, get oriented, lift up my bike, and ride back to the pits. My shoulder was bruised, helmet trashed, bell rung, brake lever cracked and windscreen broken. With Jim's help we got the bike sorted out and using my back-up helmet I rode all day Sunday. The problem was that I had only a weak theory about what happened and this resulted in another, filthy dirty tenant making plans to occupy my head.

A few weeks ago, I was invited to join a ride with a bunch of FZ1 riders. I knew 3 or 4 of them and was looking forward to getting my street legs tuned up and was pleased to accept the invitation. Unfortunately the ride was interrupted by a nasty crash in the hills of Vermont. It occurred far behind me so I only know what happened based on what others saw. Apparently an inexperienced rider experienced a most common case of target fixation and went off the road into a deep ditch. He suffered several broken bones but fortunately none of it was life threatening, and probably not even

¹ <http://www.batmanmoto.com/Trips%20and%20Rides/Novice%20Crash2.pdf>

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life changing. The rest of the group really stepped up in a big way and the entire event was handled calmly and appropriately. None-the-less, another tenant got in line for that nice free space in my head.

Then came May 11th and 12th. My friend Jim was anxious to start Road Racing. He would have joined me last year but for an injury to his shoulder sustained in a crash at Grattan. We loaded up the trailer and set up at the track for the school on Friday. Things went well and I even got to run a few practice sessions Friday afternoon. It appears however, that the tenants had moved in, taken up residence, and were whispering subtle, but negative thoughts. My lap times were a full 10 seconds slower than my best times last year. I was OK with that though since my plan was to concentrate on lines and body position and not worry about times. My race plan was to grid last and simply to finish.

Saturday arrived with a blush and a smile. Perfect blue sky and ideal temperatures. While Jim hassled through the hours of paperwork I finished safety wiring the BatBike and got through tech. I was able to ride both practice sessions in the morning and once again my lap times reflected how tentative I was in running the circuit.

The good news was that I was able to work with Race Control to grid in the last row of the first wave. Step one of the 'eviction plan' was accomplished and for now my squatters seemed content to work on arranging the furniture.



A little before noon, Bruce, another friend of ours, arrived to watch Jim run his Rookie Race. As they started to line up we made our way to the start-finish line so we could take some pictures. The newly minted racers ran their warm-up lap and found their positions on the grid. Jim was in the third row and even though he didn't get a great start he somehow dove into turn one with the lead! Bruce and I watched in amazement and I got ready to take pictures as he came back on the front straight.

He never showed up. When the ambulance rolled at the end of the race another unwanted tenant was invited to move in and the others started to dance to an irregular beat and discordant tune. Bruce and I went to the Medical building and found that Jim was already there and would be OK. So we started looking for his bike and as we walked toward the bleachers at turn 3 the Experts for Race 1 were just starting their first lap. As they screamed around turn 3 a rider low sided. He was hit hard by a second rider and a third bike hit him as well. A fourth rider avoided the mayhem by riding straight into the tire wall. It was an awful crash and two ambulances eventually rolled.

A final tenant ignored all applications and moved in with his extended family and they started cooking up a huge pot of stew consisting of maggot infested road kill and week old un-refrigerated fish. I was now fully engulfed and so full of fear, uncertainty and doubt that I was beginning to question whether I was still in love with motorcycle racing, and even with riding in general. The tenants grinned evilly and whispered that the only way they would leave was if I quit.

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This was not a small matter. I have loved riding motorcycles for years and ride about 12,000 miles a year on the street. I lead rides for Seacoast Sport Cycle as well as an annual Canadian Sport Tour (CST) to the Maritimes. I have met the most wonderful people and riding motorcycles is a fundamental release and big part of my life. I started doing track days about 4 years ago and bought a track bike and began to look at racing for fun.

Suddenly – well, actually not so suddenly – I found myself questioning whether I should follow the demands of my unlawful tenants and quit the sport I had loved so much. The cacophony from my boarders was keeping me from hearing the music that usually accompanied my on my bikes.

I took Jim to a walk-in Medical Center in Concord and an x-ray showed two broken bones in his wrist. Once we determined that there was no real urgency, we headed back to the track just in time to see Rob, a good friend, set out for Race #6.

By then I had nearly decided that I would not run Race 9 and practically surrendered to my now hostile tenants.

When Rob returned, elated, from his race, I expressed my doubts, explaining that I was really concerned and suggested I might pass on racing this weekend. Maybe I would try again later in the season. I think Rob and Jim understood that if I let that happen I might never evict my unwanted guests.

They both looked me dead in the eye and told me I had to get out there. I knew they were right and, in spite of real misgivings, I agreed.

As race 8 went off I suited up. When they called 5 minutes to Race 9 I headed to the pre-grid and lined up waiting to be sent out for warm up. Even as I sat there I was thinking that I could come in after the warm up lap if I wasn't comfortable. But another part of me was already in touch with my lawyers who were drafting the paperwork for eviction.

We ran the warm up and I found my strategic position -- last row, outside, wave one. The boards came down and the green flag waved and we were off. I followed my plan and managed to slide in last and left enough space to avoid any mishaps that might happen in front of me.

I concentrated on looking through the corners and perfecting my body position. I ran the first lap, made the last turn and headed down the straight away. My lawyers appeared before the judge who began reading over my request for eviction.

As I started my second lap I was being passed by riders in the second wave. But at the same time, I realized I was behind a rider who was slower than me. So, I started setting up a pass and managed to make it cleanly just past the tree-house before turn 10. The judge approved my eviction notice and my lawyers were preparing to have my tenants served.

The rest of the race was the most interesting 5 laps I have ever run. There was a rider down just before the hill and after the tires on turn three so we had a yellow flag there for several laps. At the top of the

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hill we had a waving yellow for a rider down in the bowl. Then we saw the Red Cross Flag out with the yellow flag which meant there was an ambulance on the track. The last two laps there was no passing in the bowl because of the yellow and ambulance flags. It was racing as usual everywhere else.

As I made the bend on to the straightaway on the last lap I saw the checkered flag. And I was close to another rider so I tucked in and hammered my way past that rider just in time to beat him to the finish line.

At that exact instant every one of my tenants disappeared. They didn't just leave, they vaporized. (Apparently the process servers were more aggressive than I thought!)

I ran the cool down lap, waving to the corner workers, and rolled into the pits where I was greeted by Jim and Rob. I thanked them both. Their support and encouragement was exactly what I needed. And it reminds me of why I love this sport so much. There is always someone there willing to pass on their experience and strength.

When I got home that night I learned that Scott Bosworth was killed in the crash in turn three. I didn't know him but lots of the racers and their families did and I know that if he had been there he too would have insisted I run my race.

It's one thing to entertain ideas that you invite to the debate. It's another to let unwanted thoughts take up residence without being challenged. And sometimes it's easier to confront your fears with a little help from your friends.

On Sunday I had to be somewhere in the morning and I took the ST2. It was another perfect day and I felt absolutely free of the doubts. Like a marriage worth saving, you have to learn how to work through the inevitable issues. With help, I did. That short ride had all the essential qualities I love about riding and was perfect in every way

Let the season begin!

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Ride safe.....
.....ride often!